

Venison Italian Sausage

By Tom Dickson

Yield: 14 pounds of sausage



They say the two things you don't want to see being made are a bill in Congress and sausage. I can't attest to what happens in the nation's capitol, but I sure wouldn't mind anyone watching me make sausage. It's a beautiful sight.

The old notion that sausage is composed of butcher shop waste and floor sweepings might have been true years ago before federal food safety inspections. But these days sausages are safe and even healthy. You can find artisanal varieties made with chicken, turkey, or the traditional beef or pork, mixed with apples, leeks, onions, various cheeses, and any number of spices and herbs. Home sausage makers use fresh, quality ingredients to create delicious links and patties.

Quality sausages are nothing new. For thousands of years, Europeans have been combining ground meat and fat with salt and spices and stuffing the mixture into cleaned pig intestines. Today, the Polish kielbasa, German bratwurst, Danish pølsevogn, and Spanish chorizo are practically national dishes.

Making game sausage requires very little talent or equipment. I recently purchased a powerful electric grinder, but for years got by with my mom's old hand grinder. You can pick one up at a secondhand store for a few bucks. If going electric, try to resist buying the cheapest models. Their wimpy motors and substandard (often plastic) components make grinding slow and frustrating.

I began by making burger—85 percent venison mixed with 15 percent pork fat. That was so easy I started looking for recipes for sausage—basically burger with spices and a bit more fat. Over the years I've settled on several varieties that my wife and I eat during the year. Our favorite is venison Italian sausage (see recipe at right). 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.

INGREDIENTS (for a big batch)

- 5 lbs. venison, from any part of the animal, trimmed of all fat and as much white connective tissue as possible.
- 7 lbs. pork shoulder (also called Boston butt or pork shoulder butt)*
- 2 lbs. pork fatback*
- 6 T. table salt
- 5 T. sugar
- 2 T. crushed garlic
- 5 T. fennel seeds, toasted then crushed
- 5 T. chopped parsley
- 2 t. paprika
- 2 t. cayenne
- 2¾ c. red wine vinegar, red wine, or water, all ice cold**

* Note that surfaces, tools, or hands that touch raw pork meat or fat should be washed with hot, soapy water afterward before contact with other food.

** The cold liquid is essential for dispersing the spices and helping the protein suspend the fat in the sausage.

DIRECTIONS

Place grinder auger, medium die, blade, and a large bowl outside (if in winter) or in the freezer for 60 minutes or more to cool.

Meanwhile, cut the meat and fat into 1-inch chunks. Spread out on cookie sheets and place in freezer or outside for 30 to 60 minutes until slightly but not totally frozen.

Assemble grinder and begin feeding in the venison and pork, roughly equal portions of each for the right mix of meat and fat.

In a small bowl, mix the remaining ingredients to create a slurry.

Sprinkle the spiced slurry over the 14-pound batch of ground meat and fat and thoroughly mix, using your hands (I wear clean, lined rubber kitchen gloves). Even gloved, your hands should ache from the cold. That means the mixture is still cold enough to keep bacteria from forming and to prevent the fat from smearing.

Form into patties or stuff into casings using a sausage stuffer. Cover in plastic wrap and freeze, or grill, sauté, or poach to an internal temperature of 145° F., let rest 5 minutes, and consume.